WORLD CHRONICLE

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PROGRAMME: "WORLD CHRONICLE"

GUEST: Ronald Spiers
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Raghida Dergham, Al-Hayat, London

MODERATOR: Michael Littlejohns

SYNOPSIS

Major issues confronting the General Assembly

Ronald Spiers, the United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Political and General Assembly Affairs, discusses a wide range of issues including the Persian Gulf crisis, the Arab-Israeli conflict, Soviet-U.S. co-operation, expansion of Security Council membership and the treatment of smaller Member States. Mr. Spiers also talks about the need to further streamline the U.N. bureaucracy and the obligation on the part of the U.S. to pay its dues to the U.N.

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VOICE From United Nations Headquarters in New York, this is **WORLD CHRONICLE**, an unedited interview programme about major global issues. Here now to introduce our guest is the host of today's **WORLD CHRONICLE**.

LITTLEJOHNS: I'm Michael Littlejohns and this is **WORLD CHRONICLE**.

The crisis in the Persian Gulf is likely to cast a broad shadow over the 45th Session of the United Nations General Assembly which opened on September the 18th. Although the General Assembly is mainly a deliberative body which can only make non-binding recommendations, its debates, nonetheless, can help the public to get an accurate sense of the international community's priorities.

Our guest today, Ronald Spiers of the United States, is Under-Secretary-General for Political and General Assembly Affairs. Before joining the world organization, Mr. Spiers was a career member of the U.S. Foreign Service and a seasoned diplomat. He'll be interviewed here at United Nations Headquarters in New York by: Evelyn Leopold of Reuters; Evgueni Menkes of TASS; and Raghida Dergham of Al-Hayat of London.

Mr. Spiers, welcome to **WORLD CHRONICLE**.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Ambassador, the question of the Persian Gulf is of course, as we've said in the introduction, going to cast a broad shadow over the General Assembly throughout the three-month session but among the many items on the agenda there's no specific item on the Iraqi aggression against Kuwait, can you explain why there is that omission?

SPIERS: I think there will be ample opportunity for people to make their views on the current Middle East crisis known, whether there's a specific agenda item on that or not. There is an agenda item on the situation in the Middle East which would provide adequate scope for its discussion. As far as I know no one has moved yet to put the specific issue of Iraq on the agenda. I think it has to be recalled that under Article XII of the Charter the General Assembly is precluded from making recommendations for action on items that are under consideration in the Security Council which is of course the case with the current crisis.

LITTLEJOHNS: And there is of course an item on the attack by the Israeli forces against an Iraqi installation some years ago which was suspected of developing a nuclear weapon. This question will be debated again at this session I take it?

SPIERS: Well, it's on the agenda. Whether it's a specific object of debate I don't know. That's really going to depend on the individual nations. It's there, it will probably be allocated to one of the main committees. I personally think that that issue, the bombing in 1981 of the Osirik reactor now is distant enough in time that it's going to be eclipsed by the much more urgent current considerations in the Middle East.

LITTLEJOHNS: Some people might think the Israelis deserve a vote of thanks for that perhaps.

LEOPOLD: There are about 150 odd items on the General Assembly agenda this year correct, and a lot of them stem from the cold war era and a lot of them are shuffled over from year to year and some people would say many of them are irrelevant, is there any thought of streamlining it now that the U.N. is focusing on many different issues than are reflected in this agenda?

SPIERS: I think that this really is an important issue for the membership and one in which I'd predict there's going to be increasing attention in the future. The agenda does include more than 150 items, many of them are kind of trivial or passé. It's a scatter-shot approach to the world's problems and I feel myself that the General Assembly will be a much more useful occasion when the international community can pick ten or fifteen of the really great issues and focus on those, but so far there really hasn't been an attempt to streamline the agenda.

MENKES: Mr. Ambassador, we have been talking a lot in the recent couple of years about the Soviet American factor in the United Nations, its new role, do you envisage any specific role for this factor in these coming months?

SPIERS: Well, I think that the effect of the change in Soviet/U.S. relations has already been heavily felt in the U.N. and what that change has done is really restored the situation to the situation which prevailed at the time the U.N. Charter was drafted in 1945. The whole structure was built on the assumption of a continued consensus among the victorious members of the war time coalition and, of course, preeminently the U.S. and the Soviet Union. When the cold war began to evolve, which was really by the time the Charter was signed, this meant that a lot of the original working methods of the U.N. were not able to be implemented. Now we're coming back to that situation and the U.N. is probably now beginning to work in the way that was originally envisaged by its founders.

DERGHAM: And what is this way in particular from your point of view at this stage?

SPIERS: Well, I think it's clear in the Charter that matters of international peace and security were preeminently the responsibility of the Security Council. The Security Council could only act on a majority which had to include the five permanent members. By definition, that includes the U.S. and the Soviet Union. When the Soviet Union and the U.S. were unable to agree that meant that the Security Council could not act. That situation now is rapidly changing and we see it very much the case now in the Iraq situation.

DERGHAM: In fact what we are witnessing right now in the Security Council is a very strong appeal of the Five working together on several international regional affairs and we see that this has become a pattern in the Security Council that the five permanent members act first and then they bring on the rest of the Council. How does this sort of pattern affect the General Assembly where all membership of the United Nations has participated in the debate at least, has felt that it can have a place to make its point and have an equal vote, not as in the Security Council to be faced by a veto?

SPIERS: I think it changes a little bit the role of the General Assembly. The General Assembly is kind of an international world town meeting and anything can be discussed. I think also that the future problems that the global community is going to be faced are increasingly the kind of problems which don't fall under the jurisdiction of the Security Council. The big economic problems -- debt, development -- the big social problems -- drugs, poverty -- the big economic problems -- development and debt, and those are not subjects that the Security Council itself is going to be dealing with and I think that those are really the significant issues of the future.

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LEOPOLD: To carry on from what you just said, if the significant issues of the future are the economic and social ones do you think that the United Nations agencies, not just the resolution in the General Assembly, the U.N. agencies and the management of the Secretariat is structured in such a way to switch from cold war issues and make a profound difference on these issues?

SPIERS: Well, I am somewhat of a critic of the current organization of the Secretariat. I think it really needs modernization, I think an increasing number of the members which I have talked to have this point of view too and I think that that's also an issue that's going to be the focus of attention in the coming couple of years. The U.N. now is on the verge of having a much more important role, a much more effective role in world affairs and therefore the effectiveness of its organization in the Secretariat becomes a crucial issue which it may not have been in the past and I think that that is a subject that demands and will receive attention.

LITTLEJOHNS: What are the particular shortcomings that you have in mind, Amb. Spiers, in the Secretariat?

SPIERS: I think it's top heavy and I think a lot of the management structure of it has been kind of growing like Topsy in a rather ad hoc way over the years and I think that what it needs is a good management streamlining.

LITTLEJOHNS: You think it needs more MBAs and fewer diplomats?

SPIERS: No, I think it ....

LITTLEJOHNS: Speaking as a diplomat, aren't you an MBA as well?

SPIERS: No I'm not an MPA, I'm an MPA. I think that of course the U.N. needs specialists but also I think that it needs a structure which allows it to focus more effectively on the principal issues and I think anybody that's got an interest in management would probably come to the same conclusions.

MENKES: We talk a lot about preventive diplomacy now, do you think there could have been a chance to prevent what happened in the Gulf?

SPIERS: Well, my own view is what's happened in the Gulf is a result of a gross miscalculation. I suppose you can say if the likely response had been clearer that the move that Saddam Hussein made into Kuwait would not have taken place but I think it's essentially unpredictable and I think we will continue to encounter unpredictable things in the international front. I think that what's taking place now, the real significance of it, is the international community is in the process of defining by example how you deal with problems like this in a post-cold-war situation and so what is being done now is very much precedent setting. It's very important for how the international community copes with and deters possible things like this in the future.

MENKES: If we stick to the Gulf issue the Military Staff Committee, what could it do on a practical side?

SPIERS: Well, the original concept of the Military Staff Committee was to draw up plans for military forces which would be earmarked for the U.N. and which would be on call for the Security Council and really handled under the operation of the Security Council. I think myself that in the coming years that's going to receive also a lot of attention but I think it's

a very complicated matter. It's going to take an awful lot of work and I think that that's irrelevant for the current situation but could be quite relevant for future situations.

DERGHAM: But at this stage we still don't have United Nations control over even the resolutions that have been adopted by the Security Council which even some of them give the right to use force to individual countries in order to implement other resolutions such as the embargo, is this dangerous particularly at this time that the the G.A. will be convened and the shadow of war is very realistic?

SPIERS: I think that the situation is a potentially dangerous one although my personal expectation is that the prospect of actual military conflict now is somewhat less than it was a few weeks ago. I think that both sides are probably being quite cautious on the use of military force. I think that the United States particularly realizes, and I hope that this continues to be the case, that it's important to keep the international community moving together in lock-step and that people don't jump out ahead of what the international consensus is in dealing with this problem.

LITTLEJOHNS: The programme is **WORLD CHRONICLE**. Our guest is Ronald Spiers, United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Political and General Assembly Affairs.

DERGHAM: I wanted also to follow up on something Mr. Spiers you said a bit earlier about the defining of what might be considered a new international order in the post-cold-war era, how much are we going to see this definition applied equally to all parts of the world? For example, along with concentrating on the Gulf crisis, when will we be seeing it on other traditional hot spots, problematic regions, such as the Middle East?

SPIERS: Well, you're talking about the Palestine/Israeli conflict.

DERGHAM: Exactly.

SPIERS: I mean the U.N. has defined its approach to that in resolutions 242, 338 and others. What has happened is that for a variety of reasons negotiations have not really been able to take off and be effective here but there's no doubt about what the majority opinion of the international community is on the Arab/Israeli issue anymore than there is on the Iraqi issue. Sometimes I think that false analogies are applied to the two issues. I personally think that the current situation in the Middle East dramatizes very much the importance of a concerted renewed effort on a resolution of the Israeli/ Palestine problem.

LEOPOLD: While there are a lot of compliments among many delegates at the United Nations on the new world order and detente between the Soviet Union and the United States, there's also a lot of criticism and fear that a bunch of the boys are getting together -- the large powers -- and figuring it all out for the rest of the world and thereby marginalizing their decision making. Do you have any views on that?

SPIERS: Yes, this is an old problem. There's a strong sense of dejá vu here for me. When I was a young diplomat working here at the U.N. in 1956 and negotiating the statute of the International Atomic Energy Agency, the U.S. delegation and the Soviet delegation worked very closely together and there were a lot of people that were concerned about a condominium, although when we didn't work closely together there was equally vehement criticism about our inability to do so. I think that that's probably inherent

in the situation. I think both the U.S. and Soviet Union are going to have to be sensitive enough to recognize that this is a problem and to deal with it in an intelligent way. I don't regard this as ultimately an overwhelming problem.

MENKES: In a recent interview you compared work for a national diplomatic institution and for an international organization and the context of what you've said was that it's better, or maybe for that matter even easier, to work for the United Nations, did I misread you on that or was that what you meant?

SPIERS: Well, what I meant was to point out the essential differences. I think that each has its own virtues and advantages. I think when you work with a national diplomatic establishment, particularly in the U.S., you tend to have more responsibility. I think it's better organized, it's more coherent, but on the other hand any diplomat finds himself having to argue positions that he necessarily doesn't fully endorse. I think in the U.N. you have a little bit more freedom here. I find it interesting to be able to deal with the Albanians and the PLO and the Vietnamese and all of those things that were prohibited when I was an American Foreign Service Officer. I find it fascinating and liberating in a way.

MENKES: Is it necessary to have your own small perestroika after so many years being an American diplomat becoming an international diplomat?

SPIERS: No, I've always been a fairly free spoken diplomat in my own establishment or in the U.N. If people don't like it, well there's not too much I can do about it.

DERGHAM: You are the highest ranking American at the United Nations and as you probably might agree this is the era of no longer UN-bashing time yet the United States owes I think about $520 million to the U.N....

SPIERS: Actually it's $620 million.

LITTLEJOHNS: That's if you include peace-keeping?

SPIERS: Yes.

DERGHAM: All right, so here we go. The United States is now benefitting from the United Nations on many levels and yet it doesn't give it its dues, how does it make you feel and what do you think should be done about it?

SPIERS: Well, it's a matter of substantial embarrassment to individual Americans. I know that I find it an embarrassing situation, I know that my former colleague Tom Pickering across the street finds it so, I know the President of the United States does because he's told me so. I think that it's very hard for a non-American to recognize but it's essentially a structural problem rather than a policy problem.

DERGHAM: Except that the Congress wants to have its cake and eat it in this particular stage?

SPIERS: I think that I've heard a lot of criticism in the last few days about kind of a righteous attack by individual members of Congress on the burden sharing for the Middle East, at the same time they seem to be oblivious to the fact that the United States is in effect in violation of an international moral and legal obligation to pay its own assessments. The administration has proposed this, the House of

Representatives has approved it, the Senate sub-committee on appropriations yesterday approved it, I hope that it will go through. Certainly the President of the United States has been actively supporting and urging that this obligation be fulfilled.

LITTLEJOHNS: Theoretically, at any rate Amb. Spiers, as of the first of the year, the 1st of January 1991, the United States could lose its vote in the General Assembly if it hasn't reduced its arrears to below the equivalent of two years dues, right?

SPIERS: Well, under the Charter that is certainly the case. Just when that kicks in for the United States I'm not absolutely clear. You'd have to talk to one of the budget experts on that. At some point it could happen, yes but so far it hasn't.

LITTLEJOHNS: Do you think this might chivvy up the Congress a bit, the possibility of that indignity?

SPIERS: I think that the Congress is focused on what I consider the number one issue for the United States and that's the general fiscal situation in the country and this is kind of a by-product of that. I think it's important that the President and the administration as they have, have made it clear that the Congress of the United States is in no doubt about the importance of this issue to U.S. foreign policy objectives. I don't think they could have been clearer on this matter. It does get caught up in these big issues of a trillion dollar budget, Graham Rudman, of the budget summit matter and the outcome is still a little bit in doubt.

LEOPOLD: Very simple question, why is this General Assembly Session going to be different from all others?

SPIERS: Well, I don't know that it will be different from all others. I've always felt that the General Assembly's predominant importance lies as a diplomatic occasion. Many years I've spent up here with Secretaries of State. We're going to have here 112 foreign ministers, 30 heads of state, 17 prime ministers, and when these people get together there are very important consultations that go on and I think that what goes on in the corridors is probably even more important than what goes on in the Assembly itself. This has always been the case in my view and will continue to be the case. I don't think this Assembly will be any exception.

MENKES: It's been 35 years that you are in the diplomatic service, what was most memorable?

SPIERS: I think the last ten months have been the most memorable. As I told somebody I think that there have been more fundamental changes that have taken place in the international scene in the last ten months than in the whole 35 years that I spent in the U.S. diplomatic service. I mean the world has really kind of turned upside down in terms of the assumptions on which most countries operated over the last three decades.

DERGHAM: You spoke earlier about the necessity for the United States and the Soviet Union to be careful in how to treat other members of the United Nations, how could they give assurances to these smaller countries who feel the fear of the condominium as it was referred to earlier?

SPIERS: I think in no other way than recognizing that that's a problem, being sensitive about it and acting in accordance with those sensitivities. You know there was a line

in Shakespeare that it's good to have a giant's strength but awful to use it as a giant and I think that this is something both the Soviet Union and the United States have to be constantly concerned about, aware of, and most American diplomats that I know and most Soviet diplomats that I know and I have many Soviet diplomatic friends that I've known over 30 years I think understand this.

LITTLEJOHNS: Amb. Spiers, there are as we know five permanent members of the Security Council -- United States, the Soviet Union, France, Britain and China -- and it's been argued by some Japanese that Japan should be a permanent member, West Germany, India and Brazil have also put in their bids from time to time. Do you think that there's any chance that the permanent membership of the Security Council could be expanded with or without a veto for the additional members?

SPIERS: Well, I'm aware that this is an increasing topic of discussion. I think it's a very difficult thing. You open a Pandora's box whenever you try to amend the Charter but also I think particularly if the Security Council becomes a more important area of activity, particularly in peace-keeping, there's going to be increasing pressure to modernize the membership. I think that that's an inevitability, I doubt that this is going to come to a head this year or next year but some time this will be a real issue for this institution.

LEOPOLD: There is talk right now of the fact that the Germanys are uniting and that gives the new Germany even greater weight than it has at the moment, are there any fears or is this bothering any of the agencies? Will they have to be restructured or do people feel that a united Germany will have a greater impact than it has? Because it's not on the Security Council you find that it has far less of a profile on the U.N. than in other world bodies.

SPIERS: I think that's the case and I think that that's one of the points that will give impetus in due course to where we look at the structure of the Security Council. I mean clearly Germany and Japan are major powers, economically and otherwise, and there are many people that feel that the U.N. can't be a modern structure without some way of recognizing that. One of the things that I've heard suggested around the corridors is maybe the EC as an institution ultimately would be one of the permanent members of the Security Council.

LITTLEJOHNS: The European Community you mean? All the members of the European Community should be a sort of collective member of the Security Council?

SPIERS: Well, that's an idea. I've got a lot of questions about this myself, the practicability about it, but it's something that's being bruited about by people.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Spiers, that's all the time we have. Thank you for joining us on this edition of **WORLD CHRONICLE**.

Our guest has been Ronald Spiers, United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Political and General Assembly Affairs. He was interviewed here at United Nations Headquarters in New York by: Evelyn Leopold of Reuters; Evgueni Menkes of TASS; and Raghida Dergham of Al-Hayat of London.

I'm Michael Littlejohns. Thank you for joining us. We invite you to be with us for the next edition of **WORLD CHRONICLE**.

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